

Message Text

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TAGS: PFOR, IN, NP

SUBJ: PRIME MINSTER HITS OUT AT CRITICS OF INDIAN POLICY

REF: KATHMANDU 1706

1. NATIONAL NEWS AGENCY (RSS) HAS GIVEN WIDE COVERAGE TO PRIME MINISTER TULSI GIRI'S RECENT INTERVIEW WITH A SMALL VERNACULAR PAPER IN KATHMANDU IN WHICH HE DEFENDED STATEMENTS MADE DURING HIS RECENT TRIP TO INDIA. THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THAT HIS STATEMENTS WERE MADE IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF NEPAL AND DID NOT IN ANY WAY SUGGEST A "TILT" IN NEPAL'S RELATIONS TOWARDS ANY COUNTRY. GIRI SAID THAT IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE TO EQUATE "GEOGRAPHICAL PROXIMITY" WITH ANY "SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH INDIA IN A POLITICAL SENSE". GIRI CHARGED THAT HIS STATEMENTS HAD BEEN DISTORTED BY ELEMENTS OF THE PRESS AND THAT ALL HE REALLY MEANT WAS THAT THE "GEOPOLITICAL COMPULSION WAS SUCH THAT AT TIMES IT GIVES ONE THE IMPRESSION THAT NEPAL'S RELATIONS WITH INDIA WERE SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT."

2. RESPONDING TO A QUESTION WHY INDIA CONTINUED TO OBJECT TO THE ZONE OF PEACE PROPOSAL, GIRI SAID THAT NEPAL HAD TRIED TO DISPEL MISUNDERSTANDINGS OVER THE ISSUE AND

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EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT "OUR EFFORTS WILL YIELD GOOD

RESULTS." IN CONCLUDING, GIRI SAID THAT HE HAD GONE TO INDIA TO BUILD A NEW ATMOSPHERE OF TRUST AND SAID HE WAS "FULLY SATISFIED" THAT THIS OBJECTIVE HAD BEEN ACHIEVED.

3. COMMENT: THERE HAS BEEN GROWING CRITICISM OF GIRI'S REMARKS WHILE IN INDIA THAT NEPAL RECOGNIZED THE EXISTENCE OF A "SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP" WITH INDIA. WE UNDERSTAND THAT PAMPHLETS HAVE BEEN DISTRIBUTED AT TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY IN KATHMANDU AND BIRATNAGAR ATTACKING GIRI, AND THERE ARE UNCONFIRMED REPORTS THAT TWO STUDENTS HAVE BEEN ARRESTED IN BIRATNAGAR FOLLOWING ABORTIVE EFFORTS TO CALL A STUDENT STRIKE IN PROTEST OVER THE PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT. IN A MEETING WITH THE CHARGE AND POLITICAL OFFICER APRIL 22 FORMER PRIME MINISTER TANKA PRASAD ACHARYA SAID THAT HIS STATEMENT (REFTEL) HAD BEEN DISTORTED BY RSS TO IMPLY THAT HE, TOO, FAVORED "BEST RELATIONS WITH INDIA." IN FACT, HE SAID, HE HAD RELEASED A STATEMENT IN WHICH HE SAID THAT THERE SHOULD BE NO SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT WITH INDIA AND THAT RELATIONS WITH ALL NEIGHBORING STATES SHOULD BE "GOOD AND EQUAL". AS A RESULT ACHARYA SAID HE HAD NOW MADE A NEW STATEMENT ATTACKING THE GOVERNMENT'S APPROACH WHICH HE CALLED "APPEASEMENT." HE DOUBTED, HOWEVER, THAT THE STATEMENT WOULD BE PUBLISHED.

4. WE ARE UNABLE TO STATE WITH ANY DEGREE OF CERTAINTY HOW WIDESPREAD IS THE CRITICISM OF GIRI'S VISIT. MOST OBSERVERS WITH WHOM WE HAVE SPOKEN RECOGNIZE THAT GIRI'S VISIT CLEARED THE AIR, YET RESULTED IN FEW, IF ANY, TANGIBLE RESULTS. THEY ALSO HAVE EXPRESSED THE VIEW THAT HIS STATEMENTS WHILE IN INDIA REFLECT THE TRUE NATURE OF ECONOMIC RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. THE PRIME MINISTER'S LATEST STATEMENT WOULD SEEM TO OFFER ASSURANCES TO THOSE WHO FEAR THAT GEOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC REALITIES WOULD BE TRANSLATED INTO UNDULY CLOSE POLITICAL RELATIONSHIP. EAVES

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